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Listening to Silence:
A Rhetorical Examination of Silence in the Tale Type “The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers”
by
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INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales are an integral part of our culture and have been for hundreds of years. Most of us grew up hearing certain stories, reading the Grimm brothers, watching Disney adaptations of classic tales, and passing these things on to the next generation. But even though we sometimes dismiss fairy tales as we get older as “stories for children,” that does not mean that fairy tales do not play an important role in our lives and cultures. Studying and understanding fairy tales can provide insight into our history, our cultures, and ourselves. As stated by Dan Ben-Amos, “The folktale has found its way into new realms and adapted to modern means of communication [and] the traditional folktale has been subjected to an array of criticisms” (qtd. in Rohrich xx). Scholars are continually looking for new approaches to folklore criticism to help us understand both how and why fairy tales are still relevant, which is why I am studying fairy tales from a rhetorical perspective.

Historically, scholars have defined folklore as a primarily oral tradition, which makes the prevalent use of silence in folktales fascinating (Dundes 31-36). We tend to communicate primarily through speech; in many cases, however, silence can communicate messages just as effectively, or even more effectively, than words. While rhetoricians often view silences as rhetorically weak, people can use silence as an influential rhetorical tool. Since people traditionally told folktales orally, the use of silence as a way to give power to the protagonist is particularly striking. To consider this concept in greater depth, I analyze how the female protagonist in “The Six Swans” and other variations of its tale type use silence in a positive rhetorical way; in each variation, the protagonist voluntarily exchanges her voice for something of greater value, highlighting the importance of speech, but also emphasizing the often-ignored

power of silence. I analyze the effects of choice on silence, why silence is the price of the brothers' freedom in "The Six Swans," and the value of voice. Rhetorical silences are complicated, and in order to understand them better, we need to study the silences within individual tale types, rather than grouping all silences in fairy tales together.

One of my favorite fairy tales growing up was "The Six Swans" (hereafter referred to as AT 451), as told by the Grimm brothers, and its variants. The story focuses on a young girl whose brothers have been turned into birds, and she frees them by not speaking or laughing for a number of years while she sews shirts for them. I loved this story because the girl was the heroine and she had to perform difficult tasks—not the traditional slaying of a dragon or going on a quest, but tasks that not only seemed more difficult to me, but also required more than just physical strength. Slaying a dragon is difficult and requires strength and wits, but it is also something that only has to be done once—kill the dragon and you are done. Remaining silent—day in and day out—for years, no matter what the circumstance or provocation, requires more strength than slaying a dragon.

Questions driving my research are:

1. How does the current analysis of rhetorical silence support the idea that the silence of the female protagonist in AT 451 is a rhetorically powerful silence?
2. How does the silence of the female protagonist in AT 451 broaden and complicate current theories of rhetorical silences?
3. How does looking at silence in fairy tales from a rhetorical standpoint broaden and complicate our understanding of those silences and of AT 451, especially regarding female silences in fairy tales?

Analyzing the silence in AT 451 helps bridge the gap between the study of rhetorical silences and the field of folklore and furthers our understanding of both silence and AT 451. My study highlights the different facets of silence and shows the need for additional terms when discussing the various aspects of rhetorical silence.

SILENCE IN FAIRY TALES

Silence in fairy tales comes in two forms: literal and metaphorical. Metaphorical silences involve the passivity of characters in fairy tales; for instance, we could refer to Cinderella as being metaphorically silent, making the argument that she does not have an active role in her story and does not have very many spoken lines. Literal silences, however, embody the traditional viewpoint of silence as the physical absence of speech. Both types of silence come mainly from female characters, which is perhaps why scholars often study silence in fairy tales through gendered and feminist lenses. For example, Jeana Jorgensen, who subverts the traditional feminist lens, argues, “A discussion of [silent] coding in folk narrative, followed by an application of queer theory to this group of tales... help[s] illuminate the image of the female hero and what she can mean to different audiences” (24). While Jorgensen and other scholars look at fairy tales through various lenses, the fairy-tale field as a whole has overlooked the possibilities of analyzing silence in fairy tales from a rhetorical perspective. A few researchers, like Stephen Gencarella, argue that rhetorical studies and folklore studies can have a mutually beneficial relationship; he cites Roger Abrahams, who suggested that the fields of folklore and rhetoric form an alliance (172). But even though this viewpoint is starting to grow, there is still a distinct lack of scholarship intertwining the fields of rhetoric and folklore, and this gap is especially apparent when looking at the current studies on silence in fairy tales. Analyzing

silence through a rhetorical viewpoint highlights power, not weakness, in the female protagonist's temporal silence in AT 451. Understanding silence's potential power can alter the way that we might view the silence in AT 451, enabling us to recognize the female protagonist as a hero freeing her brothers rather than a passive heroine who silently sews while events happen around her. Listening to silence as a strong strategy facilitates a new approach to rhetorical silence in fairy tales.

Rhetoricians often view silences as rhetorically powerless; however, people can use silence as a potent rhetorical tool (Grant-Davie 1). To illustrate the concept of strong silences, I am analyzing the temporal silence within the tale type known as 451: "The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers" within the Aarne-Thompson Tale Type Index. The idea of silence as a heroic undertaking is less prominent within The Tale Type Index, and is usually ignored or minimized as a task. Most folklore scholars use The Tale Type Index as a starting point when analyzing particular themes or events in fairy tales. Therefore, when scholars look at silence in fairy tales, they tend to categorize AT 451 with other tales involving silence, such as "The Little Mermaid," or "The Goose Girl." However, the silences in these stories are all very different, which will become evident through my analysis of the silence of the heroine in AT 451.

I am focusing on seven of the variants of AT 451 in this article. Though I am focusing on one particular tale type, my analysis of this tale can carry over into other tales containing temporal silences. While the silences in other tales may not be the same as the silence within AT 451, exploring the silence in other tales can provide further understanding of those particular tales and how silence functions within them.

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON SILENCE IN FAIRY TALES

To get a better understanding of silence in fairy tales, we need to look at what folklorists have said about the subject. Folklorists often analyze silence and voice from a feminist perspective, viewing silence as a sign of subjugation or passivity, rather than a form of power. For instance, Karen E. Rowe analyzes the silence of Philomela from Ovid, who is raped and then has her tongue cut out to prevent her from telling what happened. Philomela is resourceful, however, and finds another way to ‘speak’ and tell what happened to her, weaving her story into her cloth. Rowe argues that women can be empowered in fairy tales despite their silence, rather than because of it (54).

Other feminist perspectives on the silence of women in fairy tales relate feminine silence with feminine subjugation: “Fairy tale heroes receive gifts and assistance once they actively prove their compassion and humility; heroines, by contrast, become the beneficiaries of helpers and rescuers only after they have been abased and forced to learn humility” (Tatar 102). Scholars often view silence not only as weakness but as a way to forcibly humble people, namely women. After all, in our culture when we talk about people being silenced, it often implies that they have been forced to be quiet about something.

Ruth B. Bottigheimer attributes women’s silence in the Grimm’s fairy tales to society’s view of silence as a womanly virtue in the early 19th century: “The image of silent women and of silent repose as the most praiseworthy female character trait emerges consistently in disparate areas of German life” (117). We can find the intertwining of silence and femininity during the early 1900’s throughout the world, in places like Europe, France, and Morocco (Rackin 147; Nietzsche; Ayadi). Understanding that cultures often regarded silence as a

womanly virtue helps explain why the majority of silent characters in fairy tales are female and why the current studies of silence in fairy tales are feminist critiques. As Bottigheimer points out, protagonists, who are usually male, received silent solitude as a reward after completing their epic quests, “whereas women *were* silent, as part of their basic identity....” (118).

Bottigheimer further states that, “What has always differentiated male from female repose and silence...was the generally accepted understanding that it rewarded men for a life of striving but was enjoined upon women as comely and decent behavior. Men could be silent, but women were silenced” (118). Bottigheimer is making the argument that men could voluntarily choose to be silent, but the silence of women was always involuntary; this clearly delineates a power structure at work, where men have freedom of choice and women do not. The difference between male silences and female silences in fairy tales, Bottigheimer reiterates, is that the different silences of females in the Grimm fairy tales “serv[e] as paradigms for powerlessness” (130). This illustrates the general viewpoint of silence equating feminine helplessness in fairy tales

However, feminist criticism in general has evolved over the years. Kay Stone addresses feminist fairy-tale critiques, noting that many feminists regarded the fairy tale canon, “as an unfortunate source of negative female stereotypes. The passive and pretty heroines who dominate popular fairy tales offer narrow and damaging role-models for young readers” (228). Stone criticizes those who are still critiquing fairy tales in the same way, relying on vague generalities to carry their points, and not realizing that feminist fairy-tale scholars have “been examining the problem for three decades now” (230). Stone acknowledges that much of the feminist scholarship on fairy tales has been criticized for looking only at certain fairy tales, and

only looking at the surface of these tales. “Feminists agreed that earlier studies ignored the subtle inner strength of heroines. Cinderella, for example, emerged as resourceful rather than remorseful, but not aggressively opportunistic like her sisters” (231). Feminist critiques have gone through several phases:

The earliest feminists saw women as artificially separated from and wrongly considered unequal to men; the next generation of writers insisted that women were naturally separate from men and rightly superior; and many recent writers consider both women and men as naturally separate but potentially equal—if men shape up. (Stone 234)

While feminist scholarship has evolved in many ways, very little of that scholarship addresses the issue of silence. In my analysis of AT 451, I strive to emulate “Other feminist writers [who] have reworked old stories in new ways, to emphasize unrecognized aspects of feminine strength” (Stone 231). Considering silence from a rhetorical viewpoint allows a new way of looking at AT 451, one that recognizes the power behind the female protagonist’s silence.

Marina Warner is a feminist writer who studies feminine strengths in fairy tales. She analyzes the prominence of women storytellers and the roles that women play in fairy tales, whether as prophesiers, temptresses, victims, or heroines. Warner discusses the work of many of the leading critics of fairy tales, and she reviews their approaches to fairy-tale studies, which dismiss women as being marginalized in fairy tales. Warner’s book provides a contrast to many of the other folklore studies out there, especially concerning women in fairy tales, and she argues that a woman being silent in a fairy tale does not automatically reduce her status or make her weak.

RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SILENCE

As seen from the current scholarship, analysis of AT 451 focuses on silence either as weakness or as metaphorical strength. To understand how the silence in this tale is actually a controlled rhetorical strategy, we need to shift our focus and look at this tale through a rhetorical lens. In the study of rhetorical theory, “absence is as important as presence in understanding and evaluating symbolic action” (Borchers 192). Following this line of thought, Keith Grant-Davie illustrates how silence, or the absence of speech, is just as important rhetorically as speech. Grant-Davie discusses how rhetoricians usually regard silence as lesser, and then demonstrates how people can use silence in a more powerful way. The idea that silence is important because it is an absence is not new to folklore, as Barre Toelken noted in his study of silence in ballads: “metaphorical silence, in which that which is articulated forces us to register figuratively what isn’t being said” (93, qtd. in Jorgensen). Marina Hall also acknowledged the importance of silence rhetorically, stating, “Silence is not entirely absence, but another kind of presence” (391).

According to Grant-Davie, silence is stronger rhetorically during the following conditions (see table 1):

- When the silence is voluntary
- When the silence has a reason rather than being incidental
- When it is an unexpected silence
- When the silence is active and the audience is aware of it
- When the silence is for a length of time rather than just silence on a particular topic

Table 1

Silences

Rhetorical Silence	
Stronger	Weaker
Voluntary	Involuntary
Significant	Incidental
Unexpected	Expected
Active	Static
Temporal	Topical

As explicated by Grant-Davie, we can categorize silences within five different sets or scales: Voluntary vs. involuntary, significant vs. incidental, unexpected vs. expected, active vs. static, and temporal vs. topical (3). The first of each set is generally more rhetorically powerful, and Grant-Davie defines them in the following ways:

1. "Silence is voluntary if the silent person could speak but chooses not to. Having control over silence is prerequisite to tapping its full power. ... The first two scales ... focus on the silent person's level of control and intentionality in the silence. ..."
2. "Predictable silences may be highly rhetorical, but unexpected ones tend to be more so. ..."
3. "In an active silence, listeners are very aware of the silence as a silence, as an absence of speech and a contrast to the speech that brackets it. ..."
4. "[Temporal silences] are what we usually consider to be silences—periods of quietness. Topical silences. ... are not absolute silences but silences *on a particular topic.*" (3-5)

The more control that the silent person has over their silence, the more rhetorically strong their silence is, for both them and their audience. It is important to note that silence can be rhetorically influential for both the silent person and their audience, sometimes in the same way and sometimes in different ways.

Alina Kwiatkowska compares silence and speech to the figure and ground in a picture, explaining that, “We see relations, rather than objects, in the world around us, and we make constant figure-ground distinctions as we focus our attention on one aspect or another of the visual field” (330). She states that when it comes to a picture, the figure stands out as more defined and complete against the less distinct ground; in the auditory sense, the figure is the words, while the surrounding silence would be the ground (Kwiatkowska 330). For example, the silence of someone who is giving his or her partner the silent treatment is rhetorically stronger than the silence of someone whose silence is forced by circumstances beyond their control. There is power in choice.

THE TALE TYPE INDEX, THE MOTIF INDEX, AND AT 451

The Tale Type Index is instrumental in helping folklorists to analyze and critique fairy tales, and gives us a starting point for understanding AT 451 and the silence within it in greater depth.

Antii Aarne and Stith Thompson first devised the Tale Type Index in 1928 when they realized that though there were thousands of folk and fairy tales, many of them had similar elements (Uther). For example, AT 451 is a tale type that is identified as “The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers;” other tale types include themes like “The Maiden in the Tower,” “The Robber Bridegroom,” and “Three Hairs from the Devil.” Each tale type can contain hundreds of variations; for the purposes of my study, I am analyzing only seven of the variations of AT 451,

chosen based on the motifs within them. I am utilizing the versions of AT 451 that feature temporal silence, namely:

- “The Twelve Brothers” by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm
- “The Six Swans” by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm
- “The Twelve Wild Ducks” by Peter Christen Asbjørnsen
- “The Wild Swans” by Hans Christian Andersen
- “The Curse of the Seven Children” by Thomas Frederick Crane
- “The Bewitched Brothers” by M. Gaster
- “The Twelve Wild Geese” by Patrick Kennedy

The Tale Type Index also uses the Motif Index as a way to classify the various motifs within a tale type. Each letter of the alphabet represents a different genre of motif. For example, A is Mythological motifs, B is Animal motifs, C is motifs of Tabu, and D is Magic motifs, E is Death, etc. The numbers following the letter represent sub motifs. One of the motifs found in AT 451 is D758, disenchantment by maintaining silence; this is motif number 758, which falls under the Magic motif. While there are many motifs found within AT 451, I am focusing on disenchantment by maintaining silence (Brottman). Though The Tale Type Index and the motif index are not perfect (see Dundes’ “The Motif-Index and The Tale Type Index: A Critique”), they do function as a valuable tool in categorizing folk and fairy tales, which is why I am using these indices as a foundation for my analysis of AT 451.

Christine Shojaei Kawan separates the numerous variations of AT 451 into three clusters, the first of which “focuses on the siblings’ disenchantment through the sacrifice and cruel sufferings that are imposed on their sister, coinciding with the difficulties of the sister’s

noble marriages” (300). As the first group is the only one that features temporal silence, I am focusing on it.

The basic elements of AT 451: “The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers,” and the motifs, are included in the Appendix. To promote clarity, I have chosen to exclude elements of tale type 451 that do not belong to the seven variations that I am analyzing. Using both The Tale Type Index and the Motif Index for AT 451 as seen in the Appendix, I examine and categorize the seven different versions of AT 451 that include type 3b, the condition of temporal silence as a plot element (see table 2). I also include any of the motifs for each fairy tale that include or are relevant to the silence in the stories. Since all seven of these tales include motifs H1385.8, P253.2, D758, and D753, I only include the motifs that are not common to all of the tales in the table below. Since there are gaps in The Tale Type Index and the Motif Index, there are certain plot elements that neither index addresses; if any of these elements affect the silence within the story, I include them in parenthesis.

Table 2

Types and Motifs

Title	Tale Type	Motif
“The Curse of the Seven Children”	1bc, 3b, 4a	N711
“The Bewitched Brothers”	1a, 2b, 3b; (she fails, they remain birds forever)	
“The Twelve Brothers”	1b, 2c, 3b, 4a, 5a	N711; H215
“The Six Swans”	1a, 2b, 3b (not talk or laugh), 4ab, 5a	D753.1; N711; K2116.1.1; H215
“The Twelve Wild Ducks”	1a, 2b, 3b (not talk, laugh, or weep), 4ab, 5a	D753.1; N711; K2116.1.1; H215
“The Wild Swans”	1a, 2b, 3b, 4a, 5a	D753.1; N711; H215
“The Twelve Wild Geese”	1a, 2b, 3b (not talk, laugh, or weep), 4ab, 5a	D753.1; N711; K2116.1.1; H215

We can divide AT 451 into three categories, the first of which deals with silence.

Jorgensen looks at silent female characters in fairy tales, especially focusing on AT 451.

Jorgensen summarizes the basic plot of AT 451, articulating the important role that silence plays in the story, stating, “The female protagonist voluntarily stops speaking in order to attain the object of her quest....the protagonist remains silent while weaving the shirts needed to disenchant her brothers from their birdlike forms” (15). She analyzes the tale and the silence using a queer and feminist lens and argues that feminine silence in fairy tales is actually a form of coded protest against masculine hierarchies:

While this silence is undoubtedly disempowering in some ways as she cannot defend herself from persecution and accusations of wickedness, here I argue that the choice to remain silent is a coded form of protest. Drawing on feminist, queer, and folkloristic theories, I demonstrate that the fairy-tale female hero who chooses to remain silent does so strategically in a coded protest against patriarchal norms and constraints.

(Jorgensen 15)

Jorgensen makes the argument that the traditional view as silence as weak can be reframed, giving the silence power as a metaphor for women’s experiences. I agree with Jorgensen that silence as frailty is not the only viewpoint, and that looking at silence through a different lens can reveal how influential silence can actually be. Jorgensen has focused her area of study on viewing silence through a queer and feminist lens, which has brought greater depth to the topic of silence in fairy tales. In an effort to broaden and complicate the field beyond Jorgensen’s work, I am looking at silence in fairy tales from the perspective of rhetoric.

Other scholars have noted that the silence in AT 451 is more than just silent subjugation, recognizing the “agency of the silent sister-saviors” and how this silence is “empowering the heroine” (Bear qtd. in Jorgensen 45). Jorgensen points out the necessity of viewing silence from a more complex perspective, one that provides for more than simple black and white, and establishes “strategic silences” as being a mode of power (46).

Jorgensen mentions several fairy tales where silence is not an advantage, such as “The Goose Girl” and “Our Lady’s Child,” and equates the silence in these tales with the silence in AT 451. However, these silences are very different, rhetorically. In “The Goose Girl,” the female protagonist’s maidservant takes her place as the princess while in route to her future husband’s kingdom, and threatens to kill her (the true princess) if she does not comply. The female protagonist is not totally silent, but silent about the fact that she is the true princess when the false princess tells the prince that she is her maidservant and sends her to work as a goose girl. She is also silent involuntarily, since the false princess has threatened her with death if she speaks and reveals her true identity. In “Our Lady’s Child,” the Virgin Mary silences the female protagonist as a punishment for her refusal to admit something she did wrong. In both of these stories, the silence of the female protagonist is either a punishment or a form of coercion, and their silence is powerless. In the case of AT 451, however, her silence takes the form of a redeeming sacrifice.

When we apply the conditions of silence to AT 451 (see table 1), we see the strength behind the female protagonist’s silence; we see the need to determine further conditions of silence. Though temporal silences occur in other tales, such as “Jorinde and Joringel,” these silences usually form only a small portion of the tale. In the seven versions of AT 451 that I am

considering, the silence is a prominent part of the tale. In the seven variants of AT 451 that I am looking at, many of them are nearly the same. Therefore, I will use “The Six Swans” to represent the other tales.

There are many variations of this tale, but they all have the same basic plot: someone turns a princess’s brothers into swans, and in order to free them, she must remain silent for a certain length of time, and, in some cases, weave clothing for each of her brothers out of a specific material. The princess has power in her silence. If she cannot maintain her silence, she will lose her brothers. While the princess is carrying out her task, she meets the king, who falls in love with her. He wants to marry her, and though she weeps and struggles, it is to no avail. Although she grows to love the king, she never loses sight of her goal, and therefore remains silent as she weaves sweaters out of stinging nettles. The king’s advisor is suspicious of her silence and thinks that she must be a witch. The king does not believe him at first, but through a series of events, he is eventually convinced, especially since the queen can say nothing in her own defense. The people sentence the princess to death, but she continues working in silence. On her way to the stake, she throws the sweaters onto her brothers, they resume human shape, and she is able to defend herself verbally.

In AT 451, the female protagonist’s silence is voluntary, as she chooses to accept the conditions of silence in order to free her brothers. One could make the argument that her silence is involuntary, since her silence is coerced—after all, what kind of choice is it when your other option is to let your brothers be cursed forever? However, even though it is part of a bargain, her silence is still voluntary because she chooses to accept the bargain, knowing all of the conditions beforehand. The female protagonist’s silence is disparate from that of

Philomela's, or even that of the little mermaid's. While the little mermaid's tongue is not cut out forcibly like Philomela's, she does voluntarily accept the price of her tongue for the chance to win a soul. However, once the little mermaid made the bargain, she became physically incapable of speech and therefore she could not choose to break her silence. In AT 451, though, the princess's silence remains voluntary, because she could speak at any time if she chose to; her silence is a matter of self-control. In each variation of AT 451, the terms of the princess's brothers' freedom are always outlined by a third party; in most cases, it is a wise old man or woman who appears only to tell the princess what she must do if she wishes to free her brothers. The princess's silence might have more rhetorical weight if she was the one who determined the terms of the bargain or if her silence was not coerced. Yet, those same conditions are the ones that lend the princess's silence strength—without the element of self-sacrifice for others, maintaining her silence through the years would be even more difficult.

The princess's silence is highly significant, since it is only through her maintained silence that she can rescue her brothers and break the spell. She must maintain her silence every day, through marriage, in some cases through childbirth, through everyday frustrations and mishaps and misunderstandings, through accusations of cannibalism or witchcraft, and even through being carried to her death. Her silence is further significant because it is a planned and accepted requirement in order for her to free her brothers; she knows in advance exactly how long she will need to be silent.

While the princess expects her silence, her silence is completely unexpected to those who are unaware of the bargain she has made, including the king, and, in some cases, her brothers as well. The princess's silence remains active from the very beginning of her choice

until the end, since there are numerous times when maintaining her silence seems nearly impossible, especially as the day of her execution approaches. This active maintenance of her temporal silence—which in some cases lasts as long as six, seven, or twelve years—is a testament to her faith that her silence and hard work would break the spell and set her brothers free.

Though active and unexpected at first, as time goes on, her silence becomes weaker. As time goes by, her husband and those around her no longer expect her to speak; her silence, when unexpected, was the auditory figure, but with time, it dissolves back into the ground. In several of the variations, her mother-in-law capitalizes on her expected silence, steals her newborn children, and accuses the princess of cannibalism. When the princess's silence weakens to the point that because of it, she is about to be involuntarily 'silenced' forever through her own death, she chooses to break her silence. She uses her silence and her speech as tools to accomplish her desires and bring about her freedom and the freedom of others. In a few of the variations, the terms of her silence just happen to be up at the strategic moment: "She had already been bound to the stake, and the fire was licking at her clothing with its red tongues, when the last moment of the seven years passed" ("The Twelve Brothers," Grimm). In other versions, however, the heroine does not manage to complete her task:

The executioner seized her by the hand, but she hastily threw the eleven shirts over the swans, who were immediately transformed to eleven handsome princes; but the youngest had a swan's wing in place of an arm, for one sleeve was wanting to his shirt of mail, she had not been able to finish it. ("The Wild Swans," Andersen)

Silence can be a potent strategy, but part of what brings it power is also the power and choice to break the silence. The same is true with speech—speaking can be powerful when silence is expected, and speaking can be dangerous when silence is demanded. The female protagonist of AT 451 chooses her rhetorical strategies carefully, employing both silence and speech to achieve her goals.

As discussed previously, the feminist perspective on silence in fairy tales tends to view all silences as being the same. For instance, Bottigheimer compares the silence in AT451 to the silence in the tale “The Virgin’s Child”:

In ‘The Twelve Brothers’ the youngest sibling, a sister, must endure seven years’ silence, neither speaking nor laughing. A single word will cause her brothers’ instant death....She... stands bound to the stake on the verge of immolation when the last moment of the seven years passes, her fraternal deliverers appear, and she is rescued. In ‘The Six Swans’ the sister accepts the condition of six years’ silence to redeem her brothers—again neither laughter nor speech is allowed. She... is powerless against the world, exposed first to clamorous pursuit by the king’s huntsmen, then after marrying their king, to the lurking wickedness of her mother-in-law.... Bound and ready for grisly execution, she is released by her brothers as the last moment of the sixth year passes, and her mother-in-law is executed instead. (120-121)

While Bottigheimer claims that the female protagonist’s silence in AT 451 limits and weakens her, and that in the end, her brothers rescue her, I disagree. Even though her brothers do pull her from the fire, she first frees them through her silence; her silence is not passive, but active and powerful.

This story is thought provoking because her silence saves her brothers, but almost causes her own death. However, her silence is still a positive power rather than a negative one, as she is only able to accomplish her task by remaining silent. Silence that is difficult to maintain, but is still voluntarily kept, illustrates even more clearly the importance of the silence. The silence within AT 451 illustrates that there are other elements of rhetorical silence that need to be classified and accounted for, such as conditions that make silence either simple or more complicated.

As can be seen in table 2, the variations of AT 451 are very similar. However, they do fall into three categories regarding silence:

1. Those where silence is compounded by not being able to talk, laugh, or weep and/or sewing shirts ("The Six Swans," "The Twelve Wild Ducks," "The Twelve Wild Geese," and "The Wild Swans")
2. Those where only silence is required and she saves her brothers ("The Twelve Brothers" and "The Curse of the Seven Children")
3. Those where the sister fails to keep her silence ("The Bewitched Brothers")

While all of the seven tales that I am analyzing fit the high end of the rhetorical silence scale outlined by Grant-Davie at some or all of the time, they do so to differing levels. For instance, in some of the variations, the length of the silence is much longer; for others the silence includes not being able to laugh or weep; others must deal with events such as weaving with thistles or being accused of cannibalism or witchcraft.

Therefore, I propose to further classify silences based on whether or not the silence incurs any conditions that make the silence more difficult to maintain, such as physical duress,

emotional feelings (whether positive or negative), or silence for an extensive length of time. I will refer to silences that contain one or more of these conditions as *complicated* silences, meaning that they are more complex than other silences and require more self-control to maintain, thus giving the silence more rhetorical weight; silences that do not contain any of these conditions I will refer to as *simple* silences. Therefore, a revised version of the elements of rhetorical silences would include *complicated* silences on the stronger side, and *simple* silences on the weaker side (see table 3).

Table 3

Silences Revised

Rhetorical Silence	
Stronger	Weaker
Voluntary	Involuntary
Significant	Incidental
Unexpected	Expected
Active	Static
Temporal	Topical
Complicated	Simple

Looking at the tale type elements, motifs, and types of silence, the similarities and differences in the seven versions of AT 451 are easier to see (see table 4).

Table 4

Tale Types and Silences

Style	Title	Tale Types	Motifs	Silence
Type 1: Silences that include not talking/laughing/weeping and/or sewing shirts	“The Six Swans”	1a, 2b, 3b (not talk or laugh), 4ab, 5a	D753.1; N711; K2116.1.1; H215	Voluntary Significant Unexpected Active Temporal Complicated
	“The Twelve Wild Ducks”	1a, 2b, 3b (not talk, laugh, or weep), 4ab, 5a		
	“The Twelve Wild Geese”			
	“The Wild Swans”	1a, 2b, 3b, 4a, 5a	D753.1; N711; H215	
Type 2: Just no speaking	“The Twelve Brothers”	1b, 2c, 3b , 4a, 5a	N711; H215	Voluntary Significant Unexpected Active Temporal Simple
	“The Curse of the Seven Children”	1bc, 3b, 4a	N711	
Type 2: Just no speaking, protagonist fails	“The Bewitched Brothers”	1a, 2b, 3b; (she fails, they remain birds forever)		

As can be seen from table 4, the main difference in the silence in the different versions lies in whether or not the silence is simple, or if it is complicated by other conditions and circumstances. Of course, the degree to which the silence is complicated differs from tale to tale.

Looking at AT 451 from a rhetorical view broadens and complicates our understanding of the tale and of silence. Within AT 451, the female protagonist chooses to undergo difficult tasks in order to rescue her brothers. Even though in most cases, she is not directly responsible for her brothers' predicament, she takes full responsibility for their plight. Though only indirectly responsible, she seems to be the only person both willing and able to save her

brothers. In some cases, the narrative defines silence as simply not speaking; other times it is defined as not speaking or laughing, or as not speaking, laughing, or weeping. In some instances she can communicate by 'making gestures,' but these apparently are not meaningful enough to communicate the reasons behind her silence or her innocence.

Her brothers' plight causes her silence; her silence causes problems when she cannot defend herself or prove her innocence; her silence almost causes her death; finishing her task, or simply doing her best (working up until her death), causes the release of her brothers; this releases her and she is able to talk, defend herself, and prevent her own death. She rescues both her brothers and herself—her brothers with silence, herself with her voice.

Her silence is valuable as the price set to free her brothers at the expense of herself; her voice is valuable as the means to free herself at the expense of her brothers. She chooses to remain silent, despite everything that happens, in order to save her brothers. However, she also chooses to speak and to act at the end in order to save both her brothers and herself.

This, of course, brings up some interesting questions. For instance, how do we define voluntary silence? The protagonist of 451 chooses to be silent in order to rescue her brothers; however, even though this silence is voluntary and she can break the silence at any time, it is a coerced silence. After all, if she does not accept the outlined conditions, her brothers will remain trapped as birds forever. In addition, if she fails at her task her brothers will remain birds, and, in some variations, they will die. There are serious consequences for not choosing silence in the first place, and more consequences for breaking silence once started. I argue that a silence can be both voluntary and coerced at the same time, since coercion does not eliminate choice, but rather limits it. However, the stronger the coercion, the weaker the

voluntariness of the choice becomes. If the negative consequences of a choice are relatively minor, they have a lesser impact on a person's choice. Since there are major negative consequences for not choosing silence in AT 451, the female protagonist's silence, while still technically voluntary, is much weaker than it would be if no coercion were present.

Jorgensen argues that "the problem with interpreting fairy-tale silence, however, is that frequently it is mundane and not magical; while it is undertaken in the context of magical elements such as the brothers' transformation into birds, the choice to stay silent is something that exists in the real world." I agree with Jorgensen that the silences in fairy tales often present juxtaposition between the mundane and the magical, and I find it interesting that the mundane often has power over the magical within fairy tales. Jorgensen further points out that in some versions of AT 451, the brothers are turned into birds due to either a spoken curse or hastily spoken words, i.e.: a mother saying she would be willing to trade all of her sons for a daughter, or a father impatiently wishing that all of his sons would become birds (Jorgensen 22). Many of the curses in AT 451 come about due to impetuous, but ordinary, words; therefore, the only thing that can break the curse is self-restrained silence.

It is important to note that the silence in AT 451 is not fulfilling the same role as the silence in other tales, such as "The Goose Girl." In "The Goose Girl," the female protagonist's silence is involuntary and under threat, and the only thing she gains by it is her own life. The silence in AT 451 is more a sacrifice or a heroic quest, since the focus of her silence is on saving others rather than herself. Jorgensen points this out by comparing the versions of AT 451 where the female protagonist frees her brothers through silence with the versions where she frees them by journeying to the sun and the moon, pointing out that though the methods of

disenchantment are different, the end result is the same. She states that: “Structurally speaking, they are equivalent, thus proving that a female hero who chooses silence is performing the same kind of heroic action as a female hero who goes on a journey and encounters frightening, supernatural beings and manages to win them over to her side” (Jorgensen 23). This illustrates that the task of remaining silent is equivalent to other heroic tasks, such as going on a quest or battling a supernatural creature.

The idea of silence as a type of heroic feat is confirmed by Warner, who states that “Silence could be a stratagem of survival for women” (395), especially since “The heroine who suffers wrongs in silence...is eventually triumphantly vindicated” (391-92). She further acknowledges that the silence within AT 451 functions as a form of heroic feats: “In ‘The Twelve Brothers’ and its analogous tales, the offerings of silence redeems another—or several others—from the zoomorphic enchantment which binds them, as in tales of Beauty and the Beast” (Warner 396). It is important to recognize that the female protagonist in AT 451 chooses to be silent, and she chooses when to speak. Her silence frees her brothers and her speech frees herself: “With the essential heroic optimism of fairy tale as a genre, the story snatches victory from the jaws of defeat, eloquent vindication from the sentence of silence, triumph from the degradation of voicelessness” (Warner 395).

CONCLUSION

In the variations of AT 451, the texts occasionally refers to the female protagonist “making signs” to communicate some basic things, such as agreeing to marry the king or wanting to continue her work of sewing. None of the variations mention any communication via reading or writing, making it seem likely that the female protagonist could not read. If you cannot write, or

communicate in any way other than speech, the voice becomes a much more vital instrument. Instead of being asked to neither speak nor laugh nor cry, the modern equivalent might be to neither speak, nor text, nor email, nor use any type of writing utensil or electronic device to communicate. Considering how much our lives revolve around communication and our ability to communicate, we can perhaps empathize a bit more with the female protagonist of AT 451 and the difficulty of her task, which was made more difficult by varying circumstances. As Grant-Davie points out in his analysis of silence, when there is an absence of speech, we wonder why and we often make assumptions—perhaps of guilt in the face of an accusation. Before we assume anything about someone's silence, we should first consider its rhetorical power by remembering the female protagonist of AT 451 who willfully remained silent to save her brothers despite all opposition. When we consider silence, we must also consider all of the factors influencing that silence. Silence that is chosen has greater depth and meaning than accidental silence, but not all voluntary silences are equal, either. Complications often lie in the reasons behind the silence as well as within the silence itself. Listening to the silence in AT 451 shows just how rhetorically complicated silence can be because silence is seldom simple.

Appendix

The tale types and motifs for the seven variations of “The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers,” AT 451, that include silence as a type or motif:

I: The Brothers and their Sister

(a) Seven (twelve) brothers have a younger sister.

- a. Motifs: Z71.5.1. Seven brothers and one sister
- b. P253.0.5. One sister and six (seven, eleven, twelve) brothers.
- c. P251.6.7. Twelve brothers

(b) The parents have promised the death of the brothers if a daughter is born; the brothers discover this; the mother lets them know by a sign if a girl is born; the brothers flee; the sister finds them.

- a. S272. Sacrifice of brothers promised if girl is born.
- b. T595. Sign hung out informing brothers whether mother has borne boy or girl.
- c. N344.1. Wrong sign put out leads to boys’ leaving home.
- d. S272.1. Flight of brothers from home to avoid being sacrificed.

(c) The boys leave home out of fear of their father or stepmother.

II: Transformation of Brothers to Ravens

(a) Through a wish of their father

- a. S11. Cruel father.
- b. D521. Transformation through wish.
- c. D151.5. Transformation to raven.

d. D161.1. Transformation to swan

(b) Stepmother

a. S31. Cruel stepmother.

III: The Sister's Quest

(b) The sister must remain speechless for years and make shirts

a. H1385.8. Quest for lost brothers.

b. P253.2. Sister faithful to transformed brothers

c. D753.1. Disenchantment by sewing shirts for enchanted brothers.

d. D758. Disenchantment by maintaining silence.

e. Z72.2. Seven years, seven months, seven days.

f. D753. Disenchantment by accomplishment of tasks.

IV: The Calumniated Wife

(a) A king sees the speechless girl and marries her.

a. N711. King (prince) accidentally finds maiden in woods (tree) and marries her.

(b) On the birth of her children they are stolen and she is accused of killing them.

a. K2116.1.1. Innocent woman accused of killing her newborn children.

V: Disenchantment

(a) As she is about to be executed her period of silence is over, the ravens fly down, are disenchanted and all is cleared up.

a. H215. Magic manifestations at execution prove innocence.

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